



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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1994 AND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES: NEW ONES ADDED, COMPATIBILITY RESOLVED

The past year saw the National Wildlife Refuge System dedicate its 500th unit, gain 7 others, and add about 200,000 acres to existing units across the country. But perhaps the biggest advance of the year was the final resolution of the lawsuit concerning the compatibility of secondary uses on refuges.

Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge in West Virginia received the distinction of being named the 500th refuge. This unique northern boreal ecosystem encompasses the largest wetland complex in West Virginia and its 24,000 acres support 286 species of mammals, birds, plants, and fish, including some found nowhere else. About 86 acres were acquired in Fiscal Year 1994.

Lake Wales National Wildlife Refuge in Florida is equally unique, protecting vanishing "scrub" habitat for 45 species currently listed as threatened or endangered, or candidates for listing. Like Ash Meadows refuge in Nevada, Lake Wales is one of the few national wildlife refuges established primarily for endangered plants.

In Texas, a high-quality bottomland hardwood forest will be protected now as part of the Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge. About 4,400 acres of this habitat, valuable to a diversity of waterfowl species, were acquired in 1994. When complete, the refuge will encompass 20,000 acres.

The donation of 506 acres of bottomland hardwood forest in Arkansas by Weyerhaeuser Corporation resulted in establishment of Cossatot as the 501st refuge, protecting important habitat for migratory waterfowl in both the Central and Mississippi flyways.

Other new refuges included the Guam National Wildlife Refuge, Emiquon (Illinois), Patoka (Indiana), Big Branch Marsh (Louisiana), and Cokeville Meadows (Wyoming). Hakalau Forest refuge on the big island of Hawaii was nearly doubled in size by the addition of almost 15,000 acres.

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The refuge system also gained two additional wilderness areas, but not additional land, through the California Desert Protection Act. That act established a 3,195-acre wilderness within Havasu National Wildlife Refuge and 5,836 acres in Imperial National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge system now includes 20.7 million acres of wilderness on 65 units. Oddly enough, the very first wilderness area in the system is just 25 miles from New York City--3,660 acres of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey.

Conclusion of the lawsuit on the compatibility of secondary uses on national wildlife refuges also ended speculation that the settlement would shut down hunting and fishing. Of 5,600 uses examined, hunting and fishing programs were largely unaffected. Hunting now takes place on 272 refuges and fishing on 254, including the opening of four refuges to hunting and one to fishing in 1994.

"The compatibility lawsuit proved what we already knew--that a vast majority of activities on refuges are indeed compatible with the purposes for which those refuges were established," said Mollie Beattie, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The addition of eight new refuges continued the pace set in the last decade, during which 76 new refuges and approximately 3.6 million acres were added. The refuge system now includes 504 units encompassing 91.7 million acres in all 50 states and 5 territories. The system shrank in another respect, however, managing more acres with fewer employees and fewer dollars than any other Federal land-managing agency. In 1994, the system was managed for \$1.81 per acre, with one employee per 41,000 acres.

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